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FOR JAMES WRIGHT

Just down the road from this bar
along the tracks of the railway cars
is the place the poet James Wright
called, appropriately, bareass beach.
There you'd watch the river flow
until, drunk or young or both,
you'd strip and leap in eager flight
from this failed valley's baleful reach,
and maybe dream of swimming
all the way down to the Mardi Gras,
away from a place that once saw
much better days. Or maybe dream
of nothing more than easy death,
giving yourself quietly over to
the Ohio's cold, relentless breath.
Believe me, it has been done.
Even Martins Ferry's favorite son
couldn't really flee his roots.
Wright wrote of us living back here
in New York, abroad in Rome,
in sorrow, joy, in love or fear,
like Hemingway in Paris writing
"Up in Michigan." Reap the fruits,
though bittersweet. No one escapes home.